

Amended Claims

01.09.2004

1. Method for marking an item, comprising the steps of: (87)

- a) providing information to be applied to the item;
- b) applying a first marking to the item corresponding to the information provided in step a), wherein said first marking is printed in covert;
- c) reading said first marking applied in step b) and comparing it with the information provided in step a);
- d) applying a second marking to the item if the first marking read in step c) does not correspond to the information provided in step a);

wherein said item is affixed to a carrier or a transportation substrate prior to applying the first marking, and wherein said first marking, said reading of said first marking, and said second marking are performed in a continuous process.

2. Method according to claim 1 wherein said steps a) to d) are carried out in-line on an integrated equipment under the control of an electronic processor.

3. Method according to claim 1, wherein said second marking comprises the overprinting of said item with a cancellation mark.

4. Method according to one of the claims 1 to 3, wherein said first and said second markings are applied by a printing process.

5. Method according to one of the preceding claims, wherein said first marking and/or said second marking are performed

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by a non-contact printing method, preferably selected from the group of ink-jet printing and laser marking.

6. Method according to one of the preceding claims, wherein said first marking corresponding to said information is a bar code or a matrix code.
7. Method according to one of claims 1 to 6, wherein said first marking is printed using an ink comprising a material-based security element.
8. Method according to claim 5, wherein said first marking is applied by a laser beam to a surface carrying a light- or heat-sensitive coating.
9. Method according to one of the claims 1 to 8, wherein said information is encrypted, or carries an encrypted part.
10. Method according to one of claims 1 to 9, wherein said information is read by a device selected from the group consisting of a photocell assembly, a multi-photocell-array assembly and a camera coupled to image-processing means.
11. Method according to one of the claims 1 to 10, wherein said information is generated on a remote server.
12. Method according to one of the claims 1 to 11, wherein said second marking or canceling is applied by a non-contact printing method, particularly by ink-jet printing.
13. Method according to claim 12, wherein said ink-jet printing is performed with an ink containing a vividly colored substance.

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14. Method according to one of the claims 1 to 13, wherein said marking comprises a machine-readable component.
15. Method according to one of the claims 1 to 14, wherein the marked item is affixed to an article or good to mark that article or good.
16. Device for carrying out the method according to claims 1 to 15 comprising:
  - a) a first unit for applying a first covert marking corresponding to information to an item which is affixed to a carrier or a transportation substrate;
  - b) a reading unit for reading said first marking and the corresponding information on said item;
  - c) an electronic processor unit for comparing said information read in step b) with said information applied in step a);
  - d) a second unit for applying a second marking to said item if said information read in step b) does not correspond to said information applied in step a), wherein said first unit, said reading unit, and said second unit are arranged in-line.
17. Device according to claim 16, wherein said first unit, said reading unit, and said second unit are arranged in-line as an integrated equipment and operating under the control of an electronic processor.
18. Device according to claim 16 or 17, further comprising a quality control detector unit.